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President's Column

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Fall 2004

President's Column

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President's Column

In most of my columns, I have tried to encourage participation in SELA and its conferences. Because hurricane season coincides with this issue, I decided to take a different approach. My question for each of you is: How prepared are you and your library to deal with a disaster whether it is from a hurricane, a tornado, a flood, a fire, or some other unexpected event? A number of libraries and librarians in the southeast have faced one of more of these disastrous events in recent years and many more of us may.

I strongly encouraged you to find out what kind of procedures your library has in place. Procedures may be as simple as designating areas to which customers and employees will be directed in case of a tornado or as complicated as detailed lists of who will do what in case of specific events that threaten collections. The good news is that you don't have to start from scratch. There are wonderful resources available where you can find procedures already created for a library similar to yours. A great deal of information about disaster preparedness is available on ALA's web page at <http://www.ala.org/ala/alalibrary/libraryfactsheet/alalibraryfactsheet10.htm>. It is an annotated disaster recovery bibliography that includes numerous links to helpful web sites.

One of those links is to our own Southeastern Library Network (SOLINET) Preservation Services at http://www.solinet.net/preservation/preservation_home.cfm. This site offers not only helpful information resources but also information about training opportunities. For example, it was through this site that my own library at Georgia Southern University found a template for a disaster preparedness plan developed at a New York university that proved invaluable in developing our own disaster preparedness plan. We had an emergency plan in place, but the template quickly showed us how much more planning we needed to truly address disaster preparedness. Our planning was further enhanced when we had the opportunity to host the SOLINET day and a half hands-on disaster recovery workshop in June 2004. I cannot recommend that workshop too highly. Our emergency plan had been in place for more than ten years, and we had drafted a disaster preparedness plan with help and advice from SOLINET preservation personnel. However, the workshop put those efforts in a whole new light. The first day was devoted to training. At the end of that day, volunteers went to a mock library setting and hosed down all types of library materials that we had been collecting for the workshop. They include all types of books, film strips, photo negatives, computer discs, and paper records. The second day we were divided into teams and each team was assigned a specific area on which to practice the recovery training provided the previous day. The response to the workshop was positive at the time, and as hurricanes and tornados have torn through Georgia, Florida and other states I have heard several employees mention how glad they are that we have had disaster preparedness training.

If your library has not created disaster preparedness plans and emergency procedures, I strongly urge you to consider doing so before you are faced with a serious threat to your collections whether from a leaky sprinkler system or major storm damage. We have some real treasures within southeastern libraries, and it would be a terrible shame for them to be lost forever because we did not have procedures in place to salvage them if disaster strikes.

- Ann Hamilton